

BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0375  
WEISS/JERUSALEM

MARCH 17, 1976

ISRAEL: WEST BANK SITUATIONER

ANNCR:

THE TWIN TOWNS OF RAMALLAH AND AL-DIREH ON THE ISRAELI-  
OCCUPIED WEST BANK, NORTH OF JERUSALEM, ARE UNDER A STRICT  
MILITARY CURFEW ... AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY  
VOA CORRESPONDENT CHARLES WEISS.

VOICE:

AN ARMY OFFICER SAID THE CURFEW IS REALLY AIMED AT  
PACIFYING THE ENTIRE OCCUPIED WEST BANK, WHICH HAS BEEN  
IN THE STATE OF SIMMERING FERMENT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.  
ACCORDING TO HIM, RAMALLAH AND AL-DIREH HAVE BEEN CHOSEN  
AS EXAMPLES OF WHAT AWAITS OTHER TOWNS IF ORDER IS NOT  
RESTORED.

WEST BANKERS MAKE NO SECRET OF WHAT THEY FEEL THE  
REASONS FOR THE UNREST ARE. THERE IS A GROUP OF JEWISH  
SETTLERS WHOM THE AUTHORITIES REMOVED FROM A SITE THEY HAD  
PICKED AT THE NORTHERN END OF THE WEST BANK. FOR THE TIME  
BEING, THE SETTLERS ARE LIVING IN AN ARMY CAMP, AND  
AGITATING TO BE ALLOWED TO MAKE THEIR HOME IN OCCUPIED  
TERRITORY.

ANOTHER POINT OF CONTENTION IS A MAGISTRATE COURT  
DECISION WHICH WOULD PERMIT JEWS TO PRAY IN THE SACRED  
MOSLEM PRECINCT ON MOUNT MORIAH IN JERUSALEM. THE STATE,  
WHICH IS STILL PREVENTING JEWS FROM PRAYING THERE OUT OF  
CONSIDERATION FOR MOSLEM SENSITIVITY, HAS LAUNCHED AN APPEAL  
AGAINST THE VERDICT BUT ISN'T DOING ANYTHING TO EXPEDITE IT.

FINALLY, THERE ARE TWO INSTANCES IN WHICH ISRAELI TROOPS INVADED SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN PURSUIT OF DEMONSTRATORS IN WEST BANK TOWNS. FOR THE WEST BANKERS, THIS ADDS UP TO THE FEELING ISRAEL IS GROWING LESS CONSIDERATE OF WHAT THEY REGARD AS THE MODUS VIVENDI WHICH HAS EVOLVED IN NINE YEARS OF OCCUPATION.

ACCORDING TO A SENIOR ARMY OFFICER, ONE OF THE REASONS THESE FEELINGS ARE BEING GIVEN OVERT EXPRESSION JUST NOW IS THE WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL TWELFTH. HE THINKS THE MORE ACTIVIST INHABITANTS ARE TAKING TO THE STREETS TO FORCE THE CANDIDATES FOR MUNICIPAL OFFICE TO TAKE A MORE EXTREME ANTI-OCCUPATION POSITION.

ON TUESDAY, DEFENSE MINISTER SHIMON PERES MET WITH MAYORS OF THREE OF THE LARGEST WEST BANK TOWNS, TO WARN THAT THE ARMY WOULD TAKE WHATEVER STEP THEY NEEDED TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER. HE HELD THE ELECTED OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR SEEING THERE WERE NO DISTURBANCES. AT THE SAME TIME, THE DEFENSE MINISTER SAID THE ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD AS SCHEDULED. SIX OF THE COUNCILS UP FOR ELECTION HAVE RESIGNED IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS IN PROTEST, CLAIMING THE LATEST ISRAELI MEASURES ARE MAKING THEIR JOBS IMPOSSIBLE. THEIR RESIGNATIONS WERE NOT ACCEPTED BY THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT.

JS/PBM